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ADDRESS

OF THE

HON. WILLIAM GASTON,
MAYOR,

TO THE

City Council of Roxbury,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

TWO BRANCHES IN CONVENTION,

January 7, 1861.



ROXBURY:
PRINTED FOR THE CITY COUNCIL.
1861.

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City of Norbury.

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN, JAN. 7, 1861.

ORDERED, That twenty-five hundred copies of the Address of his Honor the Mayor be printed for the use of the City Council and for distribution among the citizens.

Sent down for concurrence.

JOSEPH W. TUCKER, *City Clerk*.

IN COMMON COUNCIL, JAN. 7, 1861.

Concurred.

JOSHUA SEAVER, *Clerk*.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE CITY COUNCIL :

WE have assembled for the purpose of entering upon our duties as members of the sixteenth City Government. At no time in the history of the City, have greater responsibilities devolved upon the City Council, than those which we assume to-day. While the City may possess an inherent energy, which enables it to grow and to prosper almost in spite of its Government, yet no one can doubt that its growth and prosperity can be largely promoted by the wisdom of our action. I feel entirely assured, that we all approach the trusts committed to us with a due appreciation of their importance, and with a resolute determination to execute them with fidelity and with diligence.

The fifteen years which have elapsed since the acceptance of the City Charter, have witnessed great changes in the appearance and condition of the City. The greater part of the territory which was at first

comprehended within our limits, has been taken from us, and is now under the government of another Corporation.

During this period of fifteen years, the City has erected a large number of valuable buildings for public uses, constructed several important public avenues, widened and improved many of the streets, built several miles of sidewalks, increased and improved the Fire Department, organized a thorough and efficient Police System, acquired for, and appropriated to, the uses and purposes of Public Squares, or Parks, several large tracts of land, and commenced a system of drainage.

Such are some of the public improvements which have been accomplished. At the same time, private enterprise has been no less active, and has wrought equally important results. Population and wealth have rapidly increased, and general prosperity has prevailed.

The policy of the Government, however, has been by no means uniform. The rigid economy which characterized the Town Government, and which failed properly to meet the wants of a rapidly increasing population, left much to be accomplished by the City Government. The transition from a system of strict economy, to one of liberal expenditures, was not sudden or immediate. In the early years of the City Government, the desire to keep taxation low and moderate, restrained the City Council from entering upon many important or expensive improvements. But, in

the meantime, the population was fast increasing, and its demands grew more pressing and imperious ; until, at length, a change in the policy became visible, and improvements were deemed more to be preferred than low taxes.

In a Town Government there is danger that economy may degenerate into penuriousness, and in a City Government, that a liberal spirit may degenerate into lavishness. It would be unjust to accuse the old Town Government of the one, and equally unjust to accuse the City Government of the other ; but I think our history does illustrate the fact, that a Town Government is not well suited for a large community, rapidly increasing in population and wealth.

And it is to this fact, and to the diversity of interests of the different sections, rather than to an illiberal spirit, that any deficiency in the matter of public improvements under the Town Government is to be charged ; and if the expenditures under the City have been large, the excuse is to be found in the fact, that under the old organization, public improvements had not kept pace with the growth of the Town, and that the City was thus born to an inheritance of labor and expense.

I propose, Gentlemen, only briefly to advert to some of the leading questions of public interest in our municipal affairs. A labored consideration of them would require a more intimate acquaintance with the details than I now possess, and would protract this address to

an unreasonable length. Statistics and recommendations from other sources will be before you, which you will find more useful than any suggestions which it is in my power to make.

SCHOOLS.

The subject which has always, in Roxbury, been deemed the one of leading importance, is that of Public Schools. Under the government of the Town, as well as under that of the City, liberal appropriations have always been made for their support. In consequence of this generous encouragement, our schools early attained a high reputation, and still maintain it.

The principal care and charge of this important subject, is, by law, confided to another branch of the Government, elected for that especial purpose ; but it is the duty of the City Council to make appropriations and provide money for their support.

During the past year, a new brick school-house has been erected on George Street, at an expense (including the cost of the land on which it stands) of about \$20,000. The school-house on Kenilworth Street, formerly called the Dudley School, has been enlarged, at an expense of about \$11,500. The Vernon Street school-house has also been enlarged, at an expense of about \$1,200. A new brick school-house has been erected in Francis Street, at an expense of about \$3,300, and the grounds connected with the Comins

School have been enlarged, by the addition of a parcel of land, purchased at the cost of about \$1,200.

The School Committee have lately published and distributed their Annual Report, containing valuable statistics and important recommendations; and I most respectfully commend this report, and its suggestions, to the attention of the City Council.

FIRE DEPARTMENT.

The Fire Department, as I am informed, remains in the same excellent condition in which it was at the commencement of the last year, and deserves the same praise at my hands, which it received from my predecessor in his last Annual Address.

The importance of a well conducted Fire Department is fully appreciated by our citizens. The large number of wooden structures which the city contains, renders us especially liable to serious conflagrations, and makes it our duty to carefully guard and protect this important branch of the public service.

During the year just closed, a new brick engine-house has been erected on Centre Street, at a cost of about \$4,000. A new Steam Fire Engine has been purchased, at an expense of \$3,000, and about \$2,000 more has, as I have been informed, been expended in the purchase of other things, needed for operating and working the new engine, and for providing furniture for the new house.

A new Reservoir has been constructed on Walnut Street, near Dale Street, during the past year.

It will require no urgency from me, to induce you to give to this Department your careful attention.

HIGHWAYS.

During the last six years, the City has made very great and expensive improvements upon the public highways; one of the earliest of which, was the widening of the lower part of Washington Street, made during the administration of Mr. Ritchie. This measure was, at the time, regarded by some as a bold one, but I think none *now* question its wisdom.

During the administration of Mr. Sleeper, Ruggles Street, (or as it was formerly called, Water Street,) after having been the subject of discussion, for some twelve or fifteen years preceding, was finally completed. Shawmut Avenue was constructed, and the widening of Tremont Street was commenced, during the same administration.

Under the administration of Mr. Otis, the widening of Tremont Street was finished, Short Street was extended to Dudley Street, Heath Street was extended from its junction with Parker Street, to Centre Street, and a part of Washington Street was widened.

Such are some, but, by no means, *all* of the important improvements made during these six years. Large sums have necessarily been expended in accomplish-

ing these valuable works, but they are works, the benefits of which will be lasting and perpetual. Much yet remains to be done in widening streets, and large outlays, for repairs, will always be required.

This is a subject which will demand of you the exercise of your best wisdom and your most watchful care.

SEWERAGE.

By reason of the increasing density of population, Sewerage has passed from a matter of convenience to a matter of necessity. The City Councils, for several years, have directed their attention to this subject. Extensive surveys, at a large expense, have been made by competent engineers, and various plans have been suggested.

The work has been commenced and must be continued. This is not the time for discussing, nor have I the necessary information to enable me properly to discuss the subject, in its details. It is enough for me now to say, that there is no subject which I feel it my duty to press more urgently upon your attention.

PUBLIC SQUARES.

During the last year, three large parcels of land have been purchased by the City, which have been devoted to the uses and purposes of Public Squares, or Parks. One, on Dale Street, containing 401,000 square feet; one, near Ruggles Street, containing 122,220

square feet; and one on Orchard Street, containing 79,785 square feet.

These parcels having been thus appropriated by the City Council, the only question now remaining for our consideration, is, what shall be done to prepare these lands for the purposes for which they have been purchased.

POLICE, ALMSHOUSE, AND FOREST HILLS CEMETERY.

The Police Department, the Almshouse Establishment, and the Cemetery at Forest Hills, are all matters of interest and importance. Upon each of these subjects, there will be reports before you, which will doubtless contain such information and suggestions as you may need for the purpose of aiding you in your deliberations.

THE ROXBURY CANAL.

The line between the City of Boston and the City of Roxbury, passes through the centre of the Roxbury Canal. The City of Boston has caused that part of the channel lying within its territory to be deepened. This act has rendered a corresponding deepening on the Roxbury side, a matter of great importance to navigation. An effort was made to induce all the abutters on the Roxbury side to unite in accomplishing this work, but the effort failed.

The City, with a view of assisting in carrying out this desirable enterprise, has purchased two parcels of land bounding on the canal, the owners of which could

not be induced to pay their proportionate part of the expense of deepening the channel. The last report of the Harbor Master contains some valuable suggestions on this subject, to which I respectfully invite your attention.

I would also recommend that such improvements be made on the land purchased by the City, as are required for the purpose of putting it into a condition to yield a proper income.

CITY DEBT.

I now approach a subject which I think will be found among the least inviting of any which I have considered. I refer to the City debt.

The following statement shows its amount at the different periods of our history.

In 1846, Feb. 1, it was	.	.	\$22,776	25
“ 1847, “ “ “	.	.	27,609	98
“ 1848, “ “ “	.	.	29,443	31
“ 1849, “ “ “	.	.	39,973	65
“ 1850, “ “ “	.	.	56,976	65
“ 1851, “ “ “	.	.	48,476	65
“ 1852, “ “ “	.	.	140,387	05
“ 1853, “ “ “	.	.	186,810	40
“ 1854, “ “ “	.	.	181,110	40
“ 1855, “ “ “	.	.	209,263	95
“ 1856, “ “ “	.	.	254,865	95
“ 1857, “ “ “	.	.	246,040	95
“ 1858, “ “ “	.	.	257,340	95
“ 1859, “ “ “	.	.	280,240	95
“ 1860, “ “ “	.	.	410,975	09

On the first day of January of the present year, the City debt was \$578,550, and, as I am informed by the City Treasurer, will, by the first day of February next, reach at least the sum of \$611,000. To this sum there will, undoubtedly, be further additions, on account of debts already contracted, and for the payment of which money must be borrowed.

It will be seen, by the foregoing statement, that the debt of the City has become quite large, and that its increase, for the last few years, has been very rapid. Undoubtedly this rapidity of increase has been occasioned by the great improvements which have lately been made. I have no doubt that many, if not all of these improvements, have received general approval. But whether the policy under which they have been made, was wise or unwise, the time for any useful discussion of it is now past. The work has been done,—the debt has been created,—and the only way to extinguish it, is to pay it. My official connection with the City enables me to bear witness, as I do most willingly bear witness, to the fact, that the administrations under which this debt was principally created, have exhibited entire devotion and fidelity to the interest of the City, and have been instrumental in accomplishing works of great public benefit.

A heavy debt is a misfortune to a corporation as well as to an individual. It cripples the energies of both. It is one of the last subjects which we desire to approach, and is one of the first which it is our duty to

meet. It is true, that with a good credit, we can defer the time of payment, by obtaining new loans to meet the old ones, but, in the meanwhile, the debt has a way of periodically reminding us of its existence, by calling for annual appropriations for the payment of its interest. We *can* leave it to those who shall come after us; but such an inheritance is one which they, in their turn, will most assuredly be inclined to transmit unimpaired to their successors.

I think it is our duty to seek to diminish the debt, rather than to inaugurate new schemes which may tend to increase it. Undoubtedly, large expenditures must continue to be made. It would not be a wise economy which would *too* rigidly restrict them; but we certainly are *not* in a condition to enter upon expensive enterprises, for which there exists no present urgency or necessity.

EMPLOYMENT FOR THE POOR.

We have many people among us, who, ordinarily, in the winter months, are unable to obtain constant employment. The present national calamities have, to some extent, paralyzed business, and thus increased the number of those who are seeking for an opportunity to labor. Whatever work of the City can be *properly* and *profitably* done, during the winter, I think should be furnished to these people, as it may relieve them from the pressure of want. I commend this subject to the *immediate* attention of the City Council.

THE LATE HON. SAMUEL WALKER.

I cannot conclude this address without referring to the loss which we have recently sustained by the death of the third Mayor of the City,—the late Hon. Samuel Walker.

Although this melancholy event was appropriately noticed by the last City Government, yet I feel that a further allusion to his great worth and ability, and to his large services, is due to his memory. I know of no man in our community, who received more general consideration and respect from all our citizens, or to whom the public heart clung more closely.

Two of our Mayors have now passed from among us. The distinguished and noble-hearted gentleman, who immediately preceded Mr. Walker in office, also preceded him to the grave. And he now sleeps amid the scenes of beauty which his own hands helped to create.

It is a matter of just pride to our citizens, that two such men consented to take so large a share, as they in their lives did take, in our municipal affairs. They have now departed, leaving to us the rich legacies of unspotted names, and of splendid examples.

CONCLUSION.

It is our good fortune, Gentlemen, to reside in a community in which all enjoy the greatest privileges and blessings. Labor receives its reward,—individual

and personal rights are maintained and secured,—general education prevails,—the spirit of courtesy, kindness and charity is nurtured and cherished,—the institutions of religion are respected,—and we are thus made the recipients of the richest benefactions of God.

It is true, that we are now under the shadow of that cloud, which rests so heavily over the whole country; but we all hope and trust, that it is among the purposes of God to dissipate that cloud, and to again permit us to enjoy the benignant light of Union, of harmony, and of peace. And I entertain a confident belief, that at the conclusion of our labors, we shall be enabled to look around us upon a prosperous and happy community.



